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RUEHIL/AMEMBASSY ISLAMABAD 6243
RUEHKT/AMEMBASSY KATHMANDU 4283
RUEHLO/AMEMBASSY LONDON 3111
RUEHNE/AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI 9838
RUEHNY/AMEMBASSY OSLO 3204
RUEHSM/AMEMBASSY STOCKHOLM 0310
RUEHKO/AMEMBASSY TOKYO 2280
RUEHCG/AMCONSUL CHENNAI 6792
RUEHBI/AMCONSUL MUMBAI 4661
RUEKDIA/DIA WASHDC
RHEHNSC/NSC WASHDC
RHHMUNA/HQ USPACOM HONOLULU HI
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RUEHGV/USMISSION GENEVA 1280

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 COLOMBO 001295

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E.O. 12958: DECL: 08/09/2016
TAGS: [PREL](#) [PTER](#) [PHUM](#) [PREF](#) [MOPS](#) [CE](#)
SUBJECT: SRI LANKA: BOTH PARTIES TAKE CREDIT FOR DAM
OPENING AS GROUND BATTLE RAGES IN EAST

REF: COLOMBO 1292 AND PREVIOUS

Classified By: James R. Moore, Charge' d'Affaires. 1.4(b,d)

¶1. (C) Summary. Both the Government of Sri Lanka (GSL) security forces and Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) claimed to have opened the Mavilaru water dam on the evening of August 8, 19 days into their battle for control over the area. At this writing, two Sri Lanka Army (SLA) soldiers had been killed and 23 injured in an intensive ground battle - using tanks, mortars and RPGs - that began before dawn on August 10. Meanwhile, the GSL has enlisted the assistance of the Australian government to conduct an independent investigation into the August 6 murders of 17 NGO workers in the predominantly-Muslim eastern town of Muttur. In Colombo, the eastern LTTE breakaway Karuna faction opened a political office August 9. End Summary.

Both Sides Take Credit For Water

¶2. (C) Both the Government of Sri Lanka (GSL) and the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) claim to have re-opened the Mavilaru water sluice August 8 at approximately 8 PM. Government papers reported August 10 that irrigation engineers must open other sections of the dam in order to fully restore water to the region. Sri Lanka Monitoring Mission spokesman Thor Omarsson told emboff on the morning of August 10 that the Sri Lanka Army (SLA) and Tigers were trading mortars and RPGs, and that the SLA had brought two tanks into the area. A military spokesman told pol FSN at noon August 10 that 23 soldiers had been injured and two killed in the ground battle this morning. A BBC journalist based in the east claimed to pol FSN that 45 civilians had been killed due to bombardment and artillery attacks in the Mavilaru region since July 20.

¶3. (C) Although an August 10 GSL press statement maintained that "Operation Water Sluice" remained ongoing in order to secure the water supply to civilians and safe passage of internally displaced persons back to their homes, some Western diplomatic observers speculated that the Mavilaru area could serve as an offensive position for a military strike against the LTTE base at Sampoor, on the southern side

of the Trincomalee harbor.

Security Forces Consolidate Position

¶4. (C) Military sources told the DATT August 10 that continued operations at the Mavilari anticut were meant to consolidate the security forces' position for an indefinite period of time. The source added that they have been able to get all towns in the area, including Muttur, under their control without having to raw troops from Jaffna.

¶5. (C) The military source estimates that the LTTE, unable to fulfill its objective, has lost 250 soldiers over the last several days of fighting. He noted that the August 7 attack on the Special Task Force Training Director in Kandy and the August 8 car bombing on an EPDP MP in Colombo were "soft target attacks" and business as usual for the LTTE. He indicated that LTTE activities in other areas are at normal levels, and that LTTE activities in the east are contained and not likely to spread.

GSL Requests Australian Investigation Team

¶6. (C) At an August 9 press conference, Human Rights and Disaster Management Minister Mahinda Samarasinghe condemned the August 6 deaths of 17 staff members of a French tsunami relief NGO in Muttur, stating: "We request the Australian Government to assist us in carrying out an impartial investigation. The Government is committed to see that the investigations are done in the most impartial manner." At the

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same press conference, Inspector General of Police Chanaka Fernando said "the actual cause of death" was yet unknown. Australian High Commissioner Greg French confirmed it would send a team of experts to investigate "the massacre in Muttur."

Humanitarian Fundamentals Ignored

¶7. (C) In the aftermath of the Muttur NGO murders and the alleged massacre of 100 male Muslims by the LTTE in the surrounding areas, Consortium for Humanitarian Agencies (CHA) director Jeevan Tayagaraja lamented to poloff on August 10 that both sides in the conflict have lost sight of humanitarian norms, including protecting NGO personnel and humanitarian vehicles. He cited an August 9 attack in which five medics were killed when an LTTE claymore exploded against a GSL ambulance in the northeastern Mullaitivu district. The NGO murders, Jeevan continued, crossed the line in which humanitarian actors are usually protected and were clearly "driven by local compulsions."

¶8. (C) According to Jeevan, several possibilities are likely: security forces could have killed the NGO workers, believing them to be LTTE informants, or the LTTE could have killed them believing them to be security forces informants. Or, angry Muslim civilians could have killed the Tamil NGO workers after the LTTE pushed Muslims out of Muttur, allegedly killing 100 men in the process.

¶9. (C) A military source told DATT the military is still investigating the NGO murders, trying to confirm the time period in which they occurred and therefore which forces would have been present in the area. The source said an initial investigation indicated that the LTTE killed up to 100 Muslims as they headed south from Muttur during the fighting, but that these murders occurred in uncleared areas and therefore cannot be confirmed at present.

Tamil Political Rivals Feel the Heat

¶10. (C) The political wing of the eastern LTTE Karuna faction, the Tamil Makkal Viduthalai Pullikal (TMVP) or Tamil People's Liberation Tigers, opened a political office in Colombo August 9 under high security. TVMP spokesperson Thuyavan told the Daily Mirror newspaper August 10 that the party would contest the next parliamentary elections.

¶11. (C) Commenting on the August 8 car bomb in Colombo which killed four and seriously injured anti-LTTE Eelam People's Democratic Party (EPDP) Sivadasan, Tamil human rights lawyer and occasional counselor to the pro-LTTE Tamil National Alliance (TNA) Moahan Balendra argued to poloff on August 9 that it was "an inside job, because Sivadasan was going to leave the EPDP to join Vigneswaran's party." (Note: An open critic of Douglas Devananda's party, former EPDP secretary K. Vigneswaran founded the All Ceylon Tamil United Front - ACTUF - in March 2006 and is actively seeking the participation of other anti-LTTE Tamil politicians.) Consortium of Humanitarian Agencies (CHA) director Jeevan Tayagarajah speculated it was likely another case of the LTTE killing off the EPDP leadership surrounding party leader Douglas Devananda. As of August 10, no additional evidence in the August 8 bombing had been reported.

Comment

¶12. (C) Comment. Although the ground battle at the Mavilaru water sluice intensified August 10, the Sri Lanka military's assessment that major operations will be contained in the east but that "soft target" attacks will continue indefinitely may be correct. Should security forces gain strong control of the Mavilaru dam area, however, we could see another battlefield for the LTTE's eastern port of

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Sampoor. As LTTE-rival Tamil political parties attempt to make their marks on the political arena, we can expect to continue to see Tamil-on-Tamil attacks as well. End Comment.
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